



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

SPEECH

Tuesday, 19 October 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Tuesday, 19 October 2010
Page 730
Questioner
Speaker Broadbent, Russell, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (6.14 pm)—Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your return to the Speakership, though it was a journey about which stories will be told. My heartfelt congratulations go to you from my position as a member of the House and as a friend. This 43rd Parliament, like all others, is not a place for the faint-hearted. It is hard to get here and it can be harder to stay here. With success comes greater difficulty. That is why every person who has the honour to serve here has my respect. We have had an election campaign, and you can read all about it from Barrie Cassidy or Mungo MacCallum—I need not have input into that. I congratulate the member for Throsby on his address just delivered. I am sure that Jennie George and Dennis would be very happy with the address that has just been given to the parliament. If they are both watching at this time to see the new member for Throsby, I wish them all the best and I hope that Jennie has given up smoking!

I have been returned to this House for the third consecutive time, which is not unusual for many but is unusual for me, having been thrown out of this place twice before. I really do owe a lot of people for my health and wellbeing in this place. I have never, ever thanked my paid staff, because I always thought it was an indulgence when they are actually working within the electorate office. But today I want to not only thank them but also pay tribute to them: Kevin Carmody, Margaret BurrIDGE, Jennifer Paproth, Ken Mitchell, Millie McLean and Prue Acheson. I also want to refer back to staff members of the past and thank Kaye Clements; my much loved friend Margaret Thompson, who came back to carry me again on election day with her partner, Rob Ellis; and Leonie Hemmingway, who has stayed through the highs and lows. I thank my supporters Neville Goodwin, Cara Carter and Mary Aldred—great workers and very professional. I say thank you for the personal and professional support I received from Gary Blackwood, the member for Narracan, and thank you to Andrew Ronalds, his Liberal team and the whole of the party, to donors great and small and especially to those people who hand out how-to-vote cards, both pre-poll and on the day. I know how grateful every member of parliament here is to those people, who often can give nothing else but who give of their time and themselves to go out and do the job for us on election day. I thank my greatest supporters: Bronwyn, Emily, Paul, Evan, Sian and Lauren. I cannot say what they have done for me. I thank all those who returned McMillan to the parliament in Liberal hands. Our overall result in Victoria was appalling. Especially disappointing was that my neighbour in La Trobe, Jason Wood, lost his seat to Labor and that we failed to retain Corangamite, Deakin and McEwen. We have a lot of work to do, but I assure you I will do my best, along with my party.

I do appreciate this parliament, with its new blood, its new enthusiasm and its returned enthusiasm—this place with its new opportunity for people to express themselves. The member for Throsby, in his first speech, just talked about the great goals that he has for his life in the parliament. I am sure every member of this parliament comes in with those goals, with the opportunity to deliver on behalf of their community, their electorate, their party, their state and this nation. Everybody out there should understand that we all come here with that intention, with that drive. I said before that this is not a place for the faint hearted; it is a place for those who are prepared to put in a lot of hard work, a lot of energy.

As the new member for Kooyong sits by me, I am reminded of my experience of the man who went before Josh and who—like Jennie George, whom I just mentioned—through voluntary retirement is no longer a part of this parliament. I want to talk about my experience of the man known simply as Petro to his friends and to his foes. When he was a young child, his teacher tried to call him Peter, to anglicise his name, but Petro staunchly refused to answer that teacher until such time as the teacher called him Petro. Then he answered the question. I think the die was cast then. But for me what stood out was his political intelligence, his great ability to focus on an issue disregarding all else, to think around that focus, to take a thought out of the box and to hone the issue just to the substantive—to dissect the argument into the important and the not so important.

Remarkable was his high regard for others, for all members of this House on all sides of the political divide. To many, Petro was confronting, but what I saw was his heart for the nation's people and how it soared beyond self-interest, the head that would not bow, the knee that would not bend, the insightful mind and intellectual integrity that are shared by so few, and the often lonely walk into the policy headwind, seemingly unaffected by personal or political attacks. Few in this House can claim beneficiaries of their efforts in such a direct way as Petro can. I

am talking in the corporate sense of the House, not about individual members of parliament, because I know you all work hard on behalf of your constituents. There are men, women and children whose lives were changed for the good, for the generations, by the persistent personal courageous conviction of this lone warrior for human rights here in this Great South Land. He came here to this House at a time of his choosing. He left this House at a time of his choosing. Many of his foes did not enjoy the same grace.

As part of his broader career in the political mainstream, he was awarded the Alan Missen Award. This award is all about integrity. You would have to be blind not to realise that I miss him a little. At the same time, I know that the future of the seat of Kooyong is in good hands with this new member and I look forward to his first address. I look forward to this parliament being all that it is cracked up to be. It is cracked up to be a house of the people. We are nothing but representatives of the people. Because my experience goes back to 1990, I know that people like me come and go. So one word of warning to new members: if you decide that rudeness or arrogance to the other members of parliament on both sides is part of your play, remember that one day you will need them.

I never forget that I am responsible to my dairy farmers, who are affected by this Murray-Darling Basin issue. My dairy farmers receive a lot of their feed from that grown in the Murray-Darling Basin. There is not a person in this country who is not affected by what happens in the Murray-Darling Basin. We need to consider whether we are going to remain internationally competitive. I have never walked away from my position that to remain internationally competitive, whether we are growing potatoes or other vegetables or supplying any sort of a market whatsoever, we need a flexible labour market. I believe that when we went to the Australian people saying that we are not different from the Labor Party on the issue of a flexible labour market we were not believed. I will always have a different position to Labor on IR. I have never walked away from that; I do not walk away from it today.

I have spent a life in small business. What we earned, we earned for ourselves. What we earned, we earned with the cooperation of the staff who worked with us every day. We had a flexible workplace before there was a flexible workplace. For the unions to say today that a student cannot come in and work for two hours but must work for three is ridiculous. Ashamedly, I do not remember all of my young students, and they say, 'Russell, I worked for you.' But they were young girls and young men then. Today, they are not young men and young girls; they are adults, and they have gone on to do marvellous things. But their first job was working in one of Broadbent's stores. We had to be flexible with our staff. Lots of them were young mums. They could not come until after nine o'clock and they had to be home by 3.30. So they made other arrangements within our businesses so that it all worked for everybody. Half the time, this parliament starts from a position that says that all employers are crooks and all workers are good. Life is not like that. It is hard.

There are others in my party who know exactly what I am talking about because they have lived my life. I am sure that they were there on a Wednesday night worrying how they were going to get enough money in the bank by two o'clock on Thursday to pay the wages of their staff. Forget the family: they were not going to get any.

In my electorate of the past is the Hazelwood power station, which supplies 25 per cent of the power that goes into the Victorian grid. Yet we have people blithely and openly saying, 'We're going to close down that power station because it suits us politically and because it is dirty.' On and on they go. The fact is, at this time we cannot. Over years, we can change it to gas. There are things that we can do. We can better clean up our act. But please do not threaten the jobs of those workers. Every time somebody makes a statement about closing down Hazelwood, my phones ripple like mad, because people see the Labor government attacking their jobs. Do you know why I am here in this place? Because Labor voters voted for Russell Broadbent. They know that he will come into this place and protect their jobs. Time and time again that came to me from those Hazelwood workers and their families. We need new power stations. Eventually, someone has to bite the bullet and build a new power station. Labor in Victoria say that they are going to go ahead and look at building a new power station. And then they get creamed by all their own people.

The most important thing to do in this country is to secure our water supply. Mr John Forrest, the member for Mallee, said in a speech yesterday that the first thing that the Romans did was to secure their water supply. That is what we have to do in this country. Power stations do not run without water. It is one of the most important issues for us to deal with as a nation.

During the last election campaign, I did not hear anybody in this House talking about self-funded retirees. They are a growing group in our community. They need the same sort of attention that we give to other groups in the community. But they have been completely ignored, in my humble opinion. They are the people who have

not only worked and saved for themselves but now live on what they have earned and saved and their assets. We as a nation do not recognise that their numbers are growing and that we need to protect them and their assets so that they can survive better on their own. But they tend to fall between the gaps. They are in every electorate. They will come and talk to you. When I went down to open the farmers market at Korumburra and Coal Creek, three different self-funded retirees came up and had long conversations about where they stood and what their issues were and how they were struggling. Not every self-funded retiree is a wealthy person.

Most of my electorate is rural. This rural students issue has been raging in my electorate and there are still people disadvantaged under the programs that we now have in place. We have to find ways to rebuild country communities. If we do not support country students we cannot expect doctors and nurses and health professionals to come back into our country communities, particularly if we are sending people away for education the whole time. We have to be able to fund that appropriately. I think we have made some moves in the right direction but I do not think we have been the whole way.

Last night I talked about the importance of health care. The West Gippsland Healthcare Group runs what we call the Warragul hospital. I would not be unlike any other member of this House who has a hospital nearby that needs rebuilding or is old—and if you have ever renovated a house or an old building you would know there are stages throughout the process when you wish you had never tried. That is why the Warragul hospital, in this case, is not on the radar for rebuilding by my state government, yet our federal government has left the impression, and we as a parliament have left the impression, that we are available to fund hospitals. I have got Leongatha, I have got Wonthaggi, which needs an upgrade, and I have got Warragul, which I am about to tell you needs \$243 million for a brand new site where they have the land or over the next 20 years—and I will be 79 or 80—we are going to rebuild solely what exists there now. At the moment the government has thrown out a couple of million dollars and said: ‘We’ll give you five new emergency bed cubicles. Both sides have agreed to that and you will get them. That’s fine. Isn’t that terrific!’ But the problem is that next year I am going to have a hospital that needs rebuilding and the year after that I am going to have a hospital that needs rebuilding. We are on the edge of Melbourne. Now we have got a new freeway—the ‘Russell Broadbent Bypass’, which we are all very happy with. Thank you, Peter Costello, for that and for all the things that went before and all that sort of stuff.

Ms Roxon interjecting—

Mr Shorten interjecting—

Mr BROADBENT—Oh, so Zahra got that one for me! Except I go back before you and Zahra with the first \$26 million. Importantly, this hospital is sitting on the cusp of an explosion of population, a 40 per cent increase. The member for La Trobe would know that Casey is really struggling at the moment. It has backups, as I know. My nephew went there the other night for a cut across his head—I will not tell you how he got it—and had to wait four hours at Casey. The family gave up in the end and went on to Dandy Valley, which is fine. That is fine for families like ours that can afford to do it. It is not fine for people who come to Casey for that initial care. That is really important. So what happens is that people are gravitating to the Warragul hospital—from Moe, Leongatha, Wonthaggi, in the south, and Neerim, in the north—for all the services that they provide. They provided 87,000 services last year. We expected that there would be a 20 per cent increase in need at the hospital—and there has been a 40 per cent one.

The minister has heard all this before from hospital after hospital after hospital. Because of what the nation has done we are now ending up with a whole lot of hospitals that are not ready. I am not coming in here and saying this is a Russell Broadbent proposal and therefore it must be a good proposal. I have to mount an argument as to why that particular hospital should get the benefit of what we do as a nation and as a state. I have got to get the state bureaucrats on side, the state government on side and the federal government on side to fund that Warragul hospital. That is a hard job. It is a hard job for any of us but we have to mount the arguments. It is no good saying, ‘I want this and a political fix of \$200 million.’ It does not work because it offends everybody. What I need to do here, and what I am trying to do, is mount the argument that this is an area that is going to have to be addressed and that I would rather a new hospital than a rebuild. That is what I have been putting to this parliament today.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Albanese**) adjourned.